PRESERVATIVE AGAINST ANGLOMANIA

LOUIS-CHARLES
FOUGERET DE MONBRON

TRANSLATED BY
ALBERT VALENTE

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First Edition

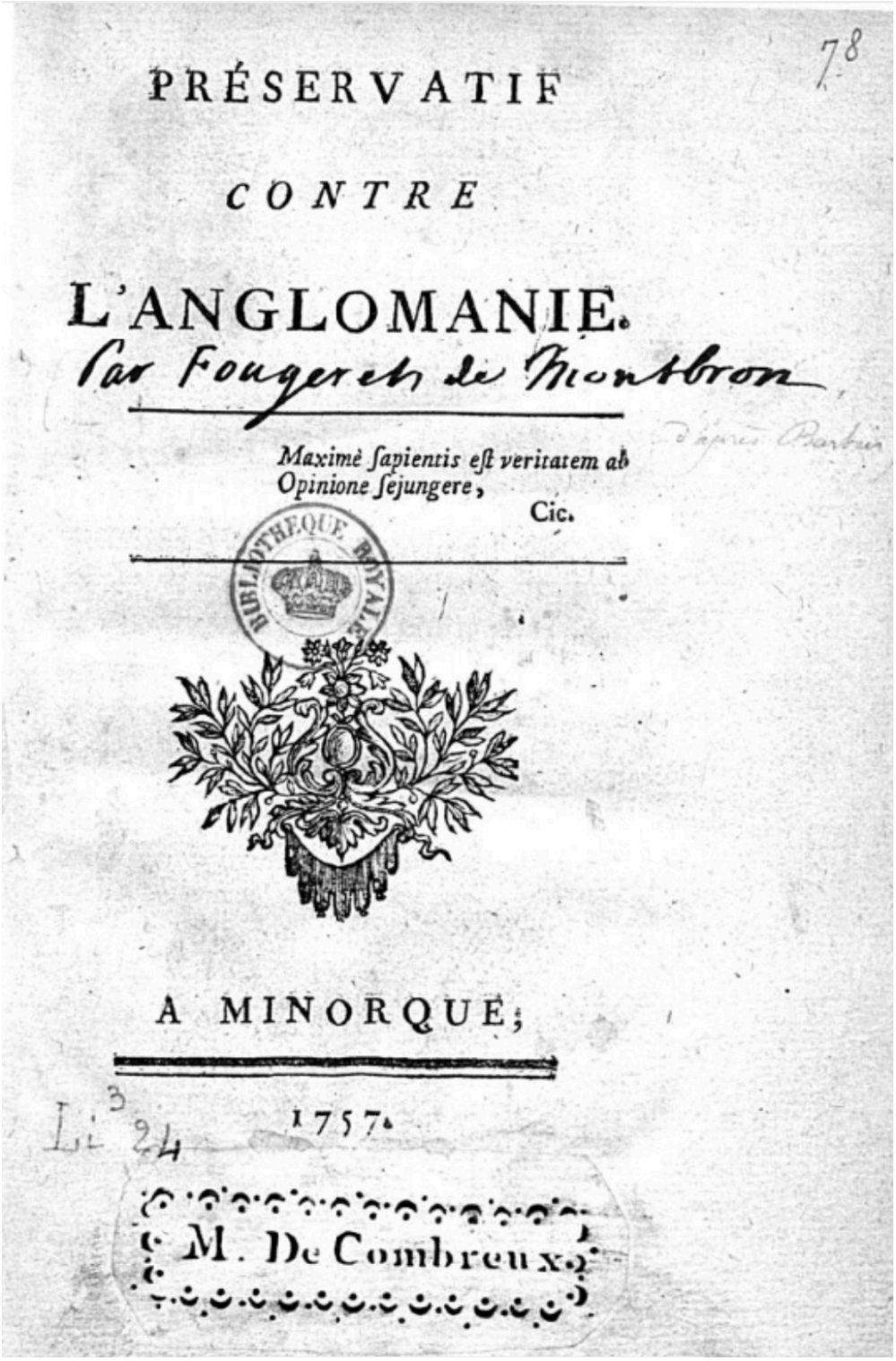
Front Cover: William Hogarth, *The March of the Guards to Finchley*, 1750, Oil on Canvas, Foundling Museum, London, UK.

PREFACE

This fiery and controversial pamphlet by Louis-Charles Fougeret de Monbron (1706-1760) was published in Minorca in 1757, the second year of the famous Seven Year's War (known as the French and Indian War in North America). This was the great war in which France would lose Quebec, her power in India, and go into a deep decline. The previous decades saw great rivalries between France and England in all fields of human endeavors ranging from war, commerce, literature, etc… In this work, Monbron attacks two major contemporary French writers whom he slightly conceals, these are Voltaire (1694-1778) and Jean-Bernard, abbé Le Blanc (1707-1781), both the abbot and Voltaire wrote great laudations on England and English culture, oftentimes to the contempt of their countrymen. Like the two, Monbron was quite a traveler, his most famous publication being his 1750 work *Le Cosmopolite ou le Citoyen du Monde* (The Cosmopolitan or the Citizen of the World) and his works have been greatly translated into Spanish and German. But England was never really his cup of tea, and he was practically invisible to the English. It can certainly be understood why his incendiary attitude wouldn't be so welcomed in England or the Anglosphere in general, his attack on Shakespeare being quite insulting to English literati, his contempt for "English liberty" being offensive to those who value England's traditions and his general attitude which is viewed very much as a prime example of French snobbery.

Nevertheless, the pamphlet helps very much to understand one side of this great rivalry, the losing side of this global conflict since indeed the 18th century can largely be seen as the triumph of England over France. My translation of this work preserves the non-standard capitalizations which shows the original character of the composition despite being a bit of a nuisance to the modern reader. The three footnotes are all Monbron's original while two asterisk marks (*) are mine. As is usual with my French translations, I aim to preserve as best I can the spirit of the original text while also giving the reader clarity and convenience.

ORIGINAL COVER



PRÉSERVATIF

CONTRE

L'ANGLOMANIE.

Par Fougeret de Montbron,

Maximè ſapientis eſt veritatem ab Opinione ſejungere,

Cic.

BIBLIOTHEQUE ROYALE

A MINORQUE;

1757.

M. De Combreux

PRESERVATIVE AGAINST ANGLOMANIA

Louis-Charles Fougeret de Monbron

Translated by Albert Valente

"Maxime sapientis est veritatem ab sejungere opinion"

- Cicero

The prejudices from which it is most difficult to return are those which witty people make us adopt. Eloquence has rights over our hearts all the more certain because, apparently, as the enemy of all tyranny and constraint, it uses only persuasion to control us. The Poets are accustomed to representing Mercury with golden chains coming out of his mouth, to teach us that in using the sweetness of elocution and the charm of speech, we make men what we want.

Philip of Macedon feared the thunderous harangues of Demosthenes more than the weapons of the Athenians; and not without reason. Indeed, by the seductive art of discourse, by the beauty and energy of language, there is nothing that one cannot persuade others; and there is no harm that a superior genius is not capable of if he abuses his talents and makes bad use of them. Thus eloquence was more than once proscribed among the Romans. Under the empire of Domitian, all orators were banished from Rome by an authentic decree of the Senate.

It has always been noted that the Innovators, the leaders of sects and parties, restless and seditious spirits, among their first qualities possessed that of expressing themselves perfectly. It was through abundant facility and graces of expression that Cardinal de Retz discovered the secret of stirring up all of Paris under the ministry of Mazarin. But without going back to past centuries, do we not have before our eyes a thousand living examples of the power that minds of the first order exercise over ordinary men? Their feelings and their tastes are the absolute rule of ours: we need their attachment to think and judge; and if they sometimes seem to leave us the freedom of our reason, it is to pay homage to them and submit to theirs.

How many accounts will the celebrated, the illustrious, the great Volt have to render to God concerning the prodigious number of brains he has reversed! There is no doubt that if this incomparable man had thought of making a new Gospel, he would not have found Apostles to

preach it, Confessors, and Martyrs to defend it. Sovereign arbiter of opinion, it is at his supreme tribunal that merit, virtues, and talents are cited and judged on the last resort. He brings forth at will the Heroes and the Demi-Gods from his hollow and deep brain, as Jupiter once brought forth Pallas Athena fully armed from his own.

Have we not seen him lend the name of History to ingenious fictions, change the facts, reverse the order of time, and establish the reign of Anachronisms? But his greatest miracle is the surprising Metamorphosis he made of the English. This people who had always been known for being the proudest, the most jealous of the success of their neighbors, the most self-interested, the most ungrateful, and the most ferocious in the world, is, according to Mr. de Volt, the most generous people, the most magnanimous, the most faithful to their commitments, the most grateful, the most humane; in a word, the true model of perfection in every kind. Good sense, in his opinion, only lives in Great Britain: it is the Sanctuary of reason: the Fatherland of the Wise.

Such a respectable decision won the English numerous partisans: people began to read their authors, to translate them, God knows if they were understood. No matter, they were found marvelous. Moreover, in imitation of the Greeks who passed through Egypt, Persia, and even into the depths of India to draw from the source of Sciences and Arts, several thousand of our Citizens stole from these proud Islanders: but what they brought back are only vapors, elixirs to destroy the stomach, and a few sparks of that philosophical spirit which teaches people disgusted with life the beautiful secret of hanging themselves.

Should not conscience reproach Mr. de Volt for having told us so many marvels on the subject of these so-called Catos? We now have among us a heap of melancholy fanatics who would be martyred for the English. The Academy itself has not been exempt from the contagion. A famous Grammerian of this illustrious Company told me one day in a very positive tone that there are no real men except in England. It will be noted that this is a country where he has never been in his life and whose language he does not understand. Would it be an insult to him to compare him to a man born blind, who without any notion of colors would meddle with and judge the different effects of the Prism?

Some of our fine minds, fortified by the authority of M. de Volt, have published observations on the English. M. l'Abbé le B.… was one of them. He reproaches M. de Muralt

for having given credence to hearsay and for having dared to pronounce on such suspect testimonies: his criticism is very judicious; but I am surprised that in making it, he did not realize that he was furnishing his readers with weapons against himself.

It's known that Mr. Abbot le B… did not stay long enough in England to flatter himself with the notion that he knew a people that's not even easy to understand in the depth of several years. Moreover, supposing that he could have done so in the short time that he stayed there: was he able to do so in the Duke of Kinston's countryside where he almost always was? Will we ever believe that it will be in a Lord and some individuals in his neighborhood that we will see the strong and the weak of a nation; that we'll discover its customs, its uses, its virtues, and vices; in a word, its good qualities and its ridiculous ones? Assuredly, if Mr. Abbot thought so, we can say, despite all the respect due to him, that he was duped.

That Mr. B… has become familiar with economic life, or the way foxes are hunted: that he has seen in these kinds of entertainments noble country folk crossing ditches and barriers on their steeds breaking their necks, as happens frequently, no one will contradict him on that. But that, in a decisive and affirmative tone he claims to enlighten us and teach us what he could not know by himself, this is what does not agree with the modesty that everyone knows him for. Would it not have been better for his honor and the satisfaction of the Public if he had ingenuously admitted in a small piece of preface that the matter did not belong to him, that he was only lending it the ornaments and graces of diction; finally that he was not a guarantor of the accuracy and truth of the remarks of Abbé H.…? Such an admission would have protected him from all censure, and he would have enjoyed no less the glory that a book as well written as his has so justly merited.

A few traits will suffice here to give an exact idea of the depth and sagacity of his discoveries. Mr. Abbot le B… says that the English are our masters in the knowledge most useful to Society. He should have, it seems to me, taught us what this knowledge is. As for me, I admit I'm dimwitted enough not to guess it. If he claims to designate agriculture, which is, in fact, the most essential and necessary of all sciences, he should know that the English owe us in part the progress of theirs. If he wants to speak of Manufactures, of the Arts; can he ignore that before the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, nobody knew how to make a hat in England; that it was our expatriate Citizens who enriched it with our work and industry; that it was they who enlightened

Europe, and that before this sad era we were the providers of everyone. Mr. Abbot le B… should also know that despite the considerable wound that such an event has affected in the Nation's body, we would've forgotten it a long time ago if the sensibility and compassion we owe to the misfortunes of our fellow men did not remind us of it.

Our enthusiasts strive in vain to depress and debase us. What weight can their declamations and their clamors have against the evidence? The surest way to convince them of stubbornness and obstinacy is to enter into the details of the matters of discussion. Will they maintain that English clothes are better than ours? We know from experience that our clothes are more manageable and are worn better and that those of English manufacture are hard and cut easily. Will they claim that they are more beautiful? One would have to have never seen or heard of the clothes of the famous factory of Mmes de Vanrobès to reasonably defend such an opinion. By everyone's admission, none can be compared to them in beauty. They still have this advantage over others; they are softer, suppler, gentler, and last longer. I could, I believe, dispense with speaking of our silk, gold, and silver fabrics, and the inimitable designs on which they are worked. Everyone is convinced of the perfection of the works of Lyon and Tours. Foreigners have taken unnecessary care and trouble to counterfeit them until now: it hasn't even served them to poach our manufacturers and designers.

Would it not seem, seeing the little success of their expensive attempts, that this is the ground where true talents germinate, and that transplanted elsewhere, they degenerate like certain seeds whose fruits are only good in the soil that is proper to them? What makes me believe that my observation in this regard is not without foundation is that although the world may desert us, other peoples are no better off for it and we are no worse off for it...

However, let us not lose sight of the object we have set ourselves and continue our examination. I will say nothing of our scarlet, braid, Paris stockings, and our hats. No one is unaware today that this merchandise is incomparably more beautiful and durable than those of the English. But who will not be marveled at the sight of our Gobelins factory? Is it possible to push art to a degree of more eminent perfection? What nobility, what correctness, what variety in the designs! What vivacity in the colors! What soul in the figures! Would one not say that Minerva herself presides over these divine Works and guides the hands of the Workers? As for

our porcelain of Vincennes, if the results do not belie the hopes that its first successes gave us the right to form, there's every reason to believe that it could one day considerably lower the price of those of Saxony and Japan. Formerly Venetian mirrors were the only ones in fashion, now ours are the most esteemed. We surpass all that is best made in this genre, as much for whiteness and polish as for size. A few years ago it was not permitted to have a good watch that did not come from England: today the Parisian watchmakers supply them to all of Europe. The famous Julien le Roy cannot do enough and what must flatter him is that in London itself everyone wants to have watches made in his style.

The eagerness that foreigners show for our jewelry is, I believe, fairly convincing proof that nowhere else is one as successful as we are in this sector. Where will one find a man like the famous Germain for goldsmithing? What delicacy, what taste, what nobility reigns in his works! Everything is finished, everything is beautiful. The English oppose these masterpieces of art only with their pieces of filigree overwhelmed with Gothic and confusing ornaments.

If I pushed these observations a little further than I should have, the cause must be attributed to my extreme zeal for the truth and my compatriots. Such a laudable motive carries its excuse with it.

Let us return to the judicious reflections of Mr. Abbot the B… after having calculated the merit and the supreme qualities of the English, he decides that a few more virtues would make them the first people on earth. Would we not be entitled to ask him how many fewer vices they would need? Mr. Abbot adds that today we should want them to serve as our models. I'm very sure that no one wants this and will ever want this. We have seen, I admit, for some time now countless madmen displaying indecency and impropriety in imitation of the English and showing themselves brazenly in the most respectable places, wrapped in a big ugly jacket, crotcheted to the shoulders, hair tucked up with a comb under the hat, and a kitchen knife stuck to the thigh. But what can we infer from this? That these are madmen who imitate others and that being counted for nothing in society, their impertinent example is not a rule to which reasonable people are obliged to conform.

Mr. Abbot le B…, who has no intention of spoiling us, says that we're the most frivolous and inconstant of all peoples. Good news: our inconstancy will take the place of reason: inconstancy has cured us of puppets; we must hope that it will cure us of the English.

I don't know where our observer fished out a short wig without powder, a handkerchief around the neck, a sailor's jacket, a knotted stick, a coarse tone and speech, the affectation of airs, and imitation of the morals of the lowest people which constitute those of the little English master. It is quite the opposite. A little English master is a kind of burden, a ridiculous and clumsy imitation of ours.

Mr. Abbot the B… is certainly not better informed when he claims that a Gentleman seeks as a favor to be received into the Society of Chair Bearers. If he were speaking of cases where it is a question of the election of a member of Parliament, he would be right. Someone who aspires to this dignity is often obliged to become familiar with and drink with people of the lowest condition to obtain their votes: but a villainous practice whose motive is interest does not prove that a Lord seeks the trade of the rabble, nor that the members are admitted into the *Club*[1] of the Peers of the Kingdom.

Here, for example, is what Mr. Abbot will not persuade anyone, that a Frenchman is better received in London than an Englishman in Paris. That people were eager to see him as he testifies, that is indeed in order, a Philosopher of his caliber is made for distinctions to which very few people have the right to aspire. Superior merit has the privilege of making itself known everywhere. We read in the Fable, that Orpheus had the art of taming Bears and the most ferocious beasts by the enchanting sounds he drew from his Lyre. The true meaning of this ingenious fiction is that Orpheus possessed to the highest degree the talent of speech and that by the sweetness of his speeches, he captivated minds and triumphed over hearts. To whom is the application of this morality more legitimately due than to Mr. Abbot le B…? His eloquence did in England what the eloquence of the Singer of Thrace [Orpheus] did in Greece.

The Abbot claims that smoke and fog prevented him from seeing London for eight months. Wouldn't one say that this city is a lime kiln, or one of those places at a certain southern latitude

[1] A cabaret where many people of a similar station in life meet once a week to eat and drink together.

that eternal mists make inaccessible? This is what is called pushing the hyperbole a little beyond the limits of good Rhetoric.

He cites elsewhere as a mark of affluence that a Valet takes his tea before going to the plow. If he lived in Holland he would know that the street beggars take it the same way. One would also be justified in saying that everyone is comfortable in France because everyone eats soup there but the soup that our beggars eat at the Hospital is very different from the succulent pottage cooked at great expense in the Farmer General's kitchen; the tea that the humble people drink in Holland and England is certainly well below that drunk by the rich Citizens. Is it not ridiculous to attach oneself to such minutiae to prove the opulence of a Nation?

But let us not abuse the Reader's patience with a longer enumeration of the Abbot's blunders. It’s time to expose to the eyes of our Anglomaniacs what my own experience has taught me about this People whose most indifferent qualities they honor; the very vices of the respectable titles of wisdom and virtue.

I have lived a lot with the English and made it a particular study of mine to understand them. I confess that despite my application and my care, it has not been possible for me to discover how they were able to find and still find today so many Partisans.

I’m far from refusing them the justice that is due to them. They have, without doubt, among them people of distinguished merit in several genres; but has Nature favored them exclusively over any other People, and would this common mother, otherwise so wise, have treated the rest of humanity like stepchildren out of predilection for them? Only fools can persuade themselves of this idea. Talents and wit have no Fatherland or fixed abode; the entire Universe is their domain.

Let blind preoccupation cease to stun us with the fastidious compliments it lavishes on the English. Let it not boast to us of the miraculous progress they have made in the painful career of the Arts and Sciences. The benefits and fruits of their laborious vigils do not speak in their favor. I want them to be the leading speculators in the world; that the most abstract and tiring calculations serve them as relaxations and leisure and that by dint of meditations and metaphysical reasonings, they evoke, so to speak, Nature, and force it to reveal what’s most

secret in it. But according to this, what does society gain from their learned and profound speculations? The most methodically obscure works, the most frivolous, and extravagant dreams that it's possible to imagine. Let us thank Heaven for not having made us with dispositions so contrary to the repose of life and so little necessary for the general good. It is astonishing that people who have taken so much trouble to acquire knowledge until today have so little part in the inventions which do the most honor to the human spirit. It is even more astonishing that we are constantly bored with the supposed merit of the English, and that we never say a word about the Italians and the Germans to whom we owe the most sublime and useful discoveries.

If the celebrity of a few individuals in England influences the whole nation, it seems to me only fair that the reputation of those who made themselves commendable elsewhere should likewise reflect on the whole body of their fellow citizens. The prerogative must be equal. That being said, the Prussians will all be astronomers since Copernicus was born among them. Tycho Brahe was born in Denmark, Galileo in Florence: therefore all the Danes and Florentines will be indistinctly able to accurately reason on the course of the stars and movements of celestial bodies. Would not a hunchback also be justified in boasting of his good height because he has a relative or compatriot that's the best-built man in the world?

By appropriating the merit of others, the English open up a more flattering field for our esteem than they realize. We have so many illustrious figures to oppose them that I don't see how anyone can reasonably contest our right to preeminence. Philosophy and Geometry have, in truth, made very great progress in England over the last two centuries. One would be very unjust or blind not to recognize the famous Newton as one of the greatest men there ever was: but without Gassendi and Descartes would he have gone as far as he did? It's not for me to decide between Philosophers of this class. I'll content myself with saying that if Gassendi and Descartes erred, Newton perhaps owes them the obligation of taking the best path and not going astray.

There was never, says Mr. de Volt, a wiser, more methodical mind, more exact Logician than Mr. Locke. This is true; but of all those who have cultivated moral philosophy, I don't believe there has ever existed such a genius as Montaigne. Despite the disorder in his essays and the Skepticism that forms their basis, his reflections are so judicious and solid, his style so bold, and his self-expression has so much grace and naturalness that I'm not surprised that an infinity of

famous writers have tried to imitate him, and that Mr. Locke himself has esteemed him enough to borrow various thoughts which he has adorned in his writings.

I would justly fear to profane a name such as that of Chancellor Bacon if, after the fair testimony that M. de Volt gives to his memory, I were to think of wanting to sow flowers on his ashes. The lot of mediocre minds is to applaud in the secret of their hearts and leave to extraordinary men the care of celebrating their fellow men. It would be desirable that our illustrious Compatriot distribute his praises more judiciously and that merit alone should always be the object. It's debasing his incense to smoke for those who aren't worthy. Nothing can be added to the sublime traits with which he painted Mr. Pope. The just tribute he pays to the talents of Mr. Addisson and Swift is praised for his discernment: but can we not reproach him for prostituting his pen, when, carried away by the fantasy of finding everything admirable, he praises indiscriminately what presents itself to his imagination, and gives us as great Poets Milord Halifax, the Dukes of Buckingham and the Comedian Cibber?

If we took the trouble to include in our literary annals all the Grimauds and Roquets who tried to have dealings with the Muses, the great minds would be too common in France, and reasonable people would almost make it an honor to be reputed as fools in order to stand out from the crowd and not be confused. Let us suppose, however, that these writers, whom one would perhaps not know without M. de Volt, are all worthy of the applause he lavishes on them, who are they compared to ours? Are even the most famous, those of the first rank, comparable to La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, La Bruyere, Bayle, Bossuet, Fenelon; in a word, to the inimitable Montesquieu? I could cite an infinity of others whose precious names are imprinted with the seal of immortality; but when one can overwhelm one's enemy by valor alone, what need does one have for numbers?

A very glorious thing for us is that our good Books are spread throughout Europe. The charming and naive Lafontaine, Despreaux, and the famous Rousseau, the great Corneille, Racine, and Moliere are in all countries, the best English authors are barely found in a few cabinets of the curious. Their partisans will object that English is not as general as French. Therefore our language is worth more than theirs; or if it is not our language, it is necessarily we

who are worth more than them. Indeed, what an appearance it is to see foreigners taking the trouble to learn French for free, and preferring it without reason to any other language.

Let us have no doubt, it is good taste which reigns in our works, it is the gentleness of our dealings and our affability, it is our customs and fashions which deserve this distinction from them. Today the French language is in Europe what the Greek language was formerly in Asia after the Conquests of Alexander, and what it has been since in Rome. Finally, what more can I say to our advantage? There is almost no court in the world where French is not spoken, and there are few on our continent where people do not pride themselves on having the air and manners of the English. I defy anyone to name one where anyone has ever taken it into their head to imitate the politeness, gallantry, gaiety, and noble bearing of the English.

Before changing the subject, let us not forget their Spectacles. We only had stages, says M. de Volt, while the English had a theater. Yes, but the change of our stages into honest and decent Scenes proves that we're not an incorrigible People. It is far from being possible to say the same thing of these gentlemen. They are still today what they were nearly two centuries ago. The ferocity and bizarreness of their characters; license and irregularity have been perpetuated in their dramas. Comedy in France is the school of good morals, propriety, and virtue. In England, it is the school of libertinism, debauchery, and corruption.

Those who wish to learn more about this subject can read the translations we have of several English plays. They will see, despite the care taken to purge them of what is obscene and coarse, and to rectify their taste and bad tone, that they are rather farces to amuse the dregs of the people than to recreate honest people. The cabal of Anglomaniacs would like in vain to elevate Shakespeare to the first rank of dramatic authors: the monstrous mixture of the sublime, the striking and terrible, the creeping, buffoonish and puerile with which his works are made, could only present to the eyes of any sensible man a madman who sometimes has good moments.

I end this article with a decision in our favor to which I know of no reply. *The Comédie Française* is performed today in all the Courts of Germany and the North. It would be ridiculous to think that foreigners were dupes; and especially that the elite of the highest rank and the Sovereigns of these vast Lands had neither taste nor good sense. It would be no less absurd to believe that the united votes, the unanimity of so many diverse Nations were equivocal. We can

therefore decide with assurance that *The Comédie Française* being more universal and more followed must be the best. The same argument gives the Italian Musicians the advantage over ours. Italian Opera is applauded and received everywhere while French Opera is not, therefore Italian Music is superior to French one. I see no answer to that.

I would like to pass over in silence the bellicose virtues of the English; so what could I say about them that would not lead to their confusion? It is known that of all peoples they are the most ignorant in the science of war and that no one is more limited than them in Tactics and evolutions, in the Art of camping and positioning oneself advantageously, in the means of maintaining an army; in a word, that they are true apprentices in the manner of attacking and to defend the Places. Nevertheless, would one believe that with so little arrogance these proud Islanders who are strictly speaking but only Merchants like the Dutch, and who like them, if they were reasonable, should only apply themselves to knowing the price and quality of merchandise, distinguishing those which can be sold best and most promptly, calculation, keeping books in a counter, and finally to studying the surest and shortest means of making a fortune? Would one believe, I say, that they would today present themselves as the cherished children of Mars, and that they claim that the whole Universe must tremble and bend under their arms? But what is most incredible is that despite the current state of humiliation to which they are reduced, the most gross and outrageous insults are the ordinary text on which they exercise their influence. The melancholy eloquence in those infamous and cold libels they make against us. What has become, they cry, of this Breton valor that nothing dared to resist in the past? Have you forgotten the time when your illustrious Fathers counted their days by the most brilliant actions? Do you no longer remember the glorious centuries when this effeminate People, lulled by softness and given over to all sorts of sensualities groaned under the weight of our chains and recognized us as their Masters? Is it more courageous now than it was? Would you be less so now than your Ancestors were? This is a lot of vain rhetoric. This lavish oration ends by saying that they often beat us when they possessed the best provinces of France as Vassals. This is a fact that deserves to be clarified.

One would be very little versed in the knowledge of our Annals if one was ignorant that when the English enjoyed Ponthieu, Normandy, Perche, Maine, Anjou, Touraine, Limousin, part of Auvergne, all of Poitou and Guyenne as far as the Pyrenees, the State was in continual

agitation and disorder. It's also known that the feudatories of the Crown were always ready to revolt under the slightest pretext, and did not fail to join forces with the enemies of the King as soon as they believed they would find their advantage there. But in all these wars, what soldiers did we have to fight? Our own compatriots. And whatever the outcome of our quarrels, it was always Frenchmen who defeated Frenchmen.

For the rest, let's leave it to the English the honor of having beaten us themselves. What remained of it? The mortification of finally being stripped of everything they occupied among us, and of seeing themselves driven out and relegated shamefully to their island. Would it not have been better for their glory if they had never set foot in France? I find it hard to believe that we would've been dislodged from such a domain so cheaply. However, it seems to me that the reproaches of the declaimers of Albion[2] have not much awakened the courage of their militia here. We have no reason to complain about them, and one can say that apart from their Piracy and brigandage, they are very tractable and good-natured people. There are, however, chatterers throughout the world who maintain that the siege of Menorca would have been much longer and more deadly if the English had not lacked brandy*. They are accused, in truth, of never fighting without first having provided their stomachs with a few shots of this powerful comforting agent. So they only have a false and artificial courage? That being so, we can call them brave men with brandy. Would to God that they often lack it for the good of our affairs!

Let's now take a brief look at the exalted government of these Preceptors of the Human Race. If we are to believe them, they are the freest and happiest people on earth. I don't truly see their freedom and the advantage that results from it could be envied by any European nation. They would perhaps be very embarrassed to explain of what consists their independence and happiness. Have they not taken until today the shadow for the body? And as Blind idolaters of a seductive phantom, have they not adored the name for the thing itself? Indeed, what is this Liberty that makes them so proud? Is it the ferocious right to be able to insult the Royal Majesty with impunity? Is it this perfect and well-established equality between the first Citizens and the vilest populace, that the Porter has the privilege of quarreling with the honest man, that a Peer of the Kingdom who is often the support of his Country, gets down from his carriage to answer the

[2] England
* Monbron uses here "Eau-de-vie", a fruit brandy usually served as a digestif

challenge of a wretch who awaits the gallows? Is it finally the infamous privilege of violating the sacred right of Nations by the eternal insults that the Rabble makes to Foreigners? In good faith, if this is what we call Liberty, would it not be more advantageous for honest people to live under a peaceful yoke? At least merit, rank, and birth would be distinguished, and the unbridled People, subjected to the rigor of the Laws, would find in the subordination and obedience for which it is made, the happiness that they're not capable of procuring for themselves. What, the partisans of Democracy will say, can one ensure the general good on the whim of a single man? I do not say that this has its drawbacks, but without entering into a discussion so often agitated about the Excellence of the Monarchical or Republican state, is the popular Government of the English more tranquil than that of the various other Powers? Is it even as much considering the troubles which reign eternally in their two Chambers, the intrigue, perfidy of its Members towards those who elected them, the interest and aggrandizement of some and others, in a word, the sharing of this famous Senate sold to the Court or the Republic by motives equally unjust and always covered with the Varnish of equity, what idea, I ask the English themselves, should one form of their happiness? And what foundations do they dare to make on men who, less concerned with the general good than with their own, are eternally divided and never seem to agree except to crush the Citizen, and profit from his misfortunes?

No one doubts that liberty is the most precious of all human goods that can be enjoyed: but she must have her limits, otherwise she soon degenerates into license, and the dreadful disorders that are necessarily accompanied are a thousand times more disastrous to the common happiness than the consequences of the most odious slavery. Let us admit it, if there is Liberty in England, she exists only for the Rabble, it seems that the Constitutions of the Kingdom were all made in their favor. One could even say that the Low People of London are above the Law by the continual abuse they make of it. Let us not then be surprised that gross and savage manners reign so generally in a country where the excrement of humanity has so many prerogatives and honest people have so few. As soon as the little ones set the tone and are the strongest, their morals will be the dominant morals, and Rusticity will penetrate to the highest rank. In France and everywhere else, it is rare that a man of quality does not appear what he is, his exterior almost always reveals it. In England, nothing is easier than to be mistaken. Often the Lord and the Rustic differ only by birth.

One should not expect the English youth to be elevated in a very distinguished manner: education based on a vicious character cannot be good. I agree that ours is still far from perfection. The considerable time we devote to College could be better employed. Fortunately, we do not lose sight of the most essential, and necessary part, I mean the science of the world and the art of living. If we leave school less burdened with classical erudition than the English, we have the advantage over them of being better educated and of not appearing to have fallen from the clouds when we enter Society. The quality of a good student presupposes all others in these gentlemen. Someone who has spent a third of his life in Oxford or Cambridge getting drunk, smoking, swearing, and what follows, and provided he understands his Homer, he'll be regarded as a subject of the first merit, but he will be only a fool, a savage without composure who opens his mouth only to say miseries.

Regarding the Originals of this kind: the celebrated Bentley, when he was in Paris, paid a visit to the Countess of Ferrers. She had a large company that day. Our Doctor who was nothing less than accustomed to the beautiful world, found himself so embarrassed that he did not know how to behave, nor how to sit on his chair. When he left, somebody asked Madame de Ferrers who he was. "He is a man", she replied, "so learned that he can tell you in Greek and Hebrew what a Stepladder is, but who doesn't know how to use one". One could not better appreciate by a single witticism the intrinsic value of these language-unravelers. In fact, what does their merit amount to? To very little. No doubt a good shoemaker is more useful to his country than such people. At any rate, the foolish mania for dead languages is so dominant in England that a Mylord is more proud to understand the different Greek Dialects than to know how to live.

I do not understand that a nation that claims to be the most reasonable should apply itself to such frivolous knowledge, and seem to take pride in ignoring the most important; that is to say, those which shape men and contribute to the pleasures of Society in the commerce of life. Complaisance and mutual considerations are, in the opinion of the English, grimacing virtues whose practice is only suitable for Slaves. They want to be free even in coarseness. Moreover, what most harms their education is the poor choice made by the people to whose conduct they are delivered. Often their Mentors would be more suited to dress them and serve them at the buffet than to instruct them in the customs of the world and inspire in them sentiments worthy of their birth. An escapee from the Mountains of Switzerland, or a Preacher of the Gospel of

Calvin, is ordinarily the worthy companion of their travels, and almost always the complacent Minister of their debauchery and villainy. This is why so many Lords after several years of absence bring back home as the only fruit of their foolishly lavished money, only more vices and a brilliant wardrobe.

Although there is no people who travel as much as the English, there are none less informed about foreign mores and customs. The reason for this is that they only associate commonly with each other and that England and London follow them, so to speak, wherever they go. Blindly preoccupied with those who do not have the good fortune to be born in Great Britain, they regard themselves as an intermediate species between Heroes and Gods and would believe themselves to be derogating from the Nobility of their being if they lent themselves to the commerce of Foreigners. Also, to what does this proud and ridiculous mania reduce them? To drink gloomily among themselves three-quarters of the day, to frequent tasteless spectacles, and to rejoice with phlegm in some public Seraglio.* What a fine occupation for people who want to enlighten the world! One should not be surprised that after such a misused time, they return to their native land full of prejudices: but what should be astonishing is to hear them put all the Peoples of Europe on Trial in a more positive tone than if they had seriously studied them: although to tell the truth, they have seen in the course of their travels, only highways, buildings and streets. In truth, when I reflect on so many impertinences, I cannot imagine that those who baptized them with the name of wise men were in good faith, or else it must be admitted that Godfathers are hardly less worthy of the Little Houses than Godchildren.

We are the only nation in the Universe that the English do not dislike. On the other hand, they do us the honor of hating us with all possible cordiality. Their aversion to us is a feeling that is instilled in them from the cradle. Before knowing that there is a God to serve, they know that there are French people to hate, and the first words they can stammer are imprecations against us, the Pretender, and the Pope. One thing that should flatter us is that every foreigner in London is always a *French dog*[3] when he's noticed for his good looks and appearance as it is generally decided that graces and politeness are the prerogatives of the French. Hence, whoever has the audacity to show in Public an easy gait, a noble and distinguished air, and considerate manners,

[3] Chien de François [This term is in Monbron's own English]
* A brothel, "Seraglio" being a fashionable 18th century euphemism associated with a Sultan's harem.

is sure to excite ridicule, not only from the most contemptible rabble; but even of what one would call in any other place honest people. The only way to escape their insults is to take, if possible, their dress and coarseness; to copy that abrupt, awkward, and sullen air that accompanies all their actions; to twist the wrist as a sign of friendship to people one knows, to be civil with impoliteness, to affect negligence to the point of appearing at the Spectacles in papillotes, in a word, to blow one's nose with one's fingers, and exhale like a pig the excess air from the opposite extremities. It's quite certain that a man who can take it upon himself to imitate all these niceties is safe from insult. I admit that delicacy and polite manners are repugnant to such a constraint but necessity has no law. We must clash with the wolves, or if the comparison is better, with the Bears.

We have a trivial Proverb that says that there are no longer friends when the river is crossed. This way of speaking could only be better applied to the English. When, against their custom, they have contracted some connections in foreign countries, they are forgotten forever as soon as they have crossed the Strait of Dover again. The waters of this short journey make the same change on them as those of the River Lethe would produce. Transport yourself to their Island as soon as they have arrived there; you're no longer known; and if by chance someone recalls some faint idea of your person, it's to overwhelm you with the most humiliating indifference, or to offer you a bad picnic at the tavern. Any man born sensitive and delicate will cry out against such strange procedures and accuse the English of the lowest ingratitude. But here is what we can respond to his reproaches. If it is true that a Sovereign who disdains to recognize the considerations, submissions, and respectful zeal that we rush to show him, cannot be placed in the ranks of the ungrateful for the very reason that we owe him everything and he owes us nothing; what dare we expect from us [Frenchmen] who, by the superiority of our mind, value, and talents, have acquired a sort of sovereignty over the entire world? To have deference and attention for us, to anticipate what flatters us, to know us in everything, is to acquit ourselves of what is owed to us, and to pay a legitimate tribute to our merit.

Let us not, however, be fooled by the gasconades of this trumpeting People: their pride cannot remove the knowledge of our worth. They would not hate us so much if they could rightly underestimate us. The way to avenge ourselves and make them despair is to not cease in

providing them with reasons for jealousy, and to make ourselves, if possible, more worthy than ever of a hatred whose principle is so glorious to us.

I am very convinced, as the illustrious M. de Montesquieu believed, that the nature of the climate and the quality of food greatly influence the character and particular affections of men. Experience is more convincing than all the reasoning of Logic. I felt during my stay in England that it is almost impossible to get used to the air one breathes there. There is a sort of malignity widespread in the Atmosphere which makes the mind as uncomfortable as the body. The continual variations of the weather constantly maintain bad humours and infirmities. The thick and coagulated blood of large meats, beers, and fogs, circulates there only by artifice, so to speak. One digests there only by force of movement and agitation: it is finally only by drowning oneself in hot water that one awakens one's lazy stomach and recalls it of its needs. All this considered, should we be shocked that people who could only make good chili by observing an eternal diet are so melancholy and savage? The affinity of the mind and the body is such that it is very rare that one does not feel the bad state of the other. Let us look at the English as a People of Valetudinarians, the unpleasantness of their commerce will cease to revolt us and we will not be able to help our pitying them. The only advantage I know of to these people there is that they have excellent horses and very good dogs; and have neither Monks nor Wolves.